

Warrant Officer recruiting top in country

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SPRINGFIELD, Illinois – Though Army Soldiers are well trained and equipped, warrant officers are Soldiers, officers and technical experts rolled into one. Warrant officers possess a high degree of specialization in a particular field in contrast to the more general assignment tasks of other officers. From highly skilled pilots to foreign intelligence, Warrant officers' career paths progress within their chosen field, including the Military Police, Special Forces, Intelligence and Field Artillery.

"I think warrant officers stay longer as a profession," said Chief Warrant Officer (5) James Gaddis, Illinois National Guard Command Chief Warrant Officer. "I think people who become warrant officers are Soldiers who have decided to make the Army a profession."

The Illinois National Guard Warrant Officer Program has had recent significant growth in the number of available warrant officer positions within the state. This growth has been brought about due to the increased force structure within the state. Illinois picked up 60 additional military positions in various units in the past three years.

There are currently 211 warrant officer positions within the state, which are filled to a 74 percent capacity.

The program leads the nation in strength management of warrant officers and continues to press forward with future goals of filling open positions to 80 percent by the end of the fiscal year.

"I believe there are three things that make Illinois successful," said Gaddis.

First, having a full-time Warrant Officer Strength Manager was a great move, Gaddis explained. He said it is easier for someone who has just completed Warrant Officer School to talk to people who have questions and are interested in becoming a warrant officer. Additionally, Illinois has placed command emphasis on the program by having a full-time Command Chief Warrant Officer in the state.

"Having the ear of senior leadership and a seat at the table of directors has had a beneficial impact on the program," said Jack "Butch" Pascoe, retired Illinois Command Chief Warrant Officer. Pascoe was the first full-time command chief warrant officer in the state and recently retired in 2006.

Finally, the state is very aggressive in training schedules and pushes to send warrant officers to school every two weeks, said Gaddis.

“It all helps the Soldier. We are trying to make school scheduling as customer friendly as we can. I think that is where we are succeeding,” Gaddis said.

Recruiting for warrant officers has many avenues, one being through former Active Duty Soldiers, Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (ROTC), but the most effective for Illinois has been recruiting from within the ranks of the Illinois Army National Guard. Illinois has the number one Warrant Officer Strength Manager in the nation during fiscal year 2007, Chief Warrant Officer Matt Glynn, and he is poised to be the top WOSM again in Fiscal Year 2008.

“We get most of our warrant officers and young commissioned officers from our ranks,” said Gaddis. “We’ve told other warrant officers that they are basically the ‘gate keepers.’ The gate keepers are the ones that are actually recruiting and going out and looking at the vacancies and talking to their Soldiers who want a change and are technically skilled.”

Once warrant officers are recruited and have been brought into the program, the commitment from the state command doesn’t stop. There are many opportunities for training and schooling for warrant officers throughout the year. Additionally, professional development continues year round.

A recent Warrant Officer Professional Development Day was held on May 14 at Camp Lincoln. This in-service training focused on warrant officer specific training and was open to all warrant officers from Warrant Officer Candidates to Chief Warrant Officer 5. The all-day event focused on promotion, education, strategic goals, mentorship and opportunities for warrant officer professional associations.

Though scheduling of such training is always a challenge due to the operation tempo and deployments, it must be accomplished.

“Coordinating schedules to train is vital because you are training for the success of the program,” said Maj. Gen. Dennis Celletti, Commander, Illinois National Guard. “You’ve got to keep it going every year,” said Gaddis. “People are hungry for the information.”

Although the maximum age for new warrant officers is 46, some candidates are determined to enter the program to make a difference, no matter how much paperwork is involved.

Warrant Officer Tim Baker, a newly appointed warrant officer and retired Army sergeant, recently graduated from Warrant Officer Candidate School at the age of 52.

Baker is training to become a Signal Systems Technician and is assigned to Company C, 33rd Brigade Special Troops Battalion from Carbondale. He brings with him highly specialized skills from the civilian world as a professor of electronics at John A. Logan College in Carterville.

Baker was determined to re-enlist after Sept. 11 and requested an age waiver in order to be accepted into the Warrant Officer Program. Since being accepted, Baker's goal has been to deploy this year with the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team.

"His attitude is incredible," exclaimed Gaddis. "He is a sergeant who got out and then got back in because of the War on Terror and because he wanted to contribute. He has volunteered to deploy this fall; his son is going." Although success within the state Warrant Officer Program is evident, there is always room for improvement.

There are several warrant officer positions to fill within the state, specific to the specialties of military intelligence, special forces and property book office, and the command is focusing on those areas.

"Our goal is to be at 80 percent capacity by the end of this year," said Gaddis. "Our goal for fiscal year 2009 is to get above 85 percent."

The method to achieve that success begins at the command level by holding information briefings to major commands to express the need to fill vacancies for warrant officers.

Once warrant officers are placed into positions, they stay. They don't have a high turnover rate," shared Gaddis.

"Warrant officers are in it for the long haul. They stay a long time."

"We've got some people who have been in the same building for 40 years," stated Gaddis. "A Soldier retired recently and had been in Decatur the whole time. It's longevity."

By keeping existing warrant officers active, recruiting technically proficient Soldiers, and having strong lines of communication amongst the program members, the Illinois Warrant Officer Program is laying a strong foundation for the future.